NEW COVENANTS

VOLUME 2

And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.

—Nephi

With each new mind, a new secret of nature transpires; nor can the Bible be closed until the last great man is born.

—Emerson

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IV

"But Joseph," Emma blurted from his side,
as they reclined, young lovers intertwined
in scandalous and innocent repose
along the riverbank, "we hadn't met
yet—when Moroni told you that to claim
the record you would have to bring the right
companion to Cumorah. Furthermore,
I can't see why an angel should regard
a man *more* worthy of his trust because
he managed to seduce an unabashed
but unwed maiden from her father's home
with talk of gold."

"Unwed? But I had thought—
which is to say, the question presupposed
that we would . . ." Rudderless, adrift in new,
uncharted waters, Joseph searched for firm
ground. In the upward curve of Emma's lips,
which bent to an inverted rainbow, as
a sign that she would no more give him cause
for doubt as to the singularity
and strength of her affections, Joseph found
his heading—and his tongue. Like some
pre-modern pilot sent a sextant, he
sailed onward, more assuredly, and sought
to know that nothing had been lost in his
translation of her silence: "Will you help
me liberate the plates and wrestle with
an angel? Be my wife, and come away

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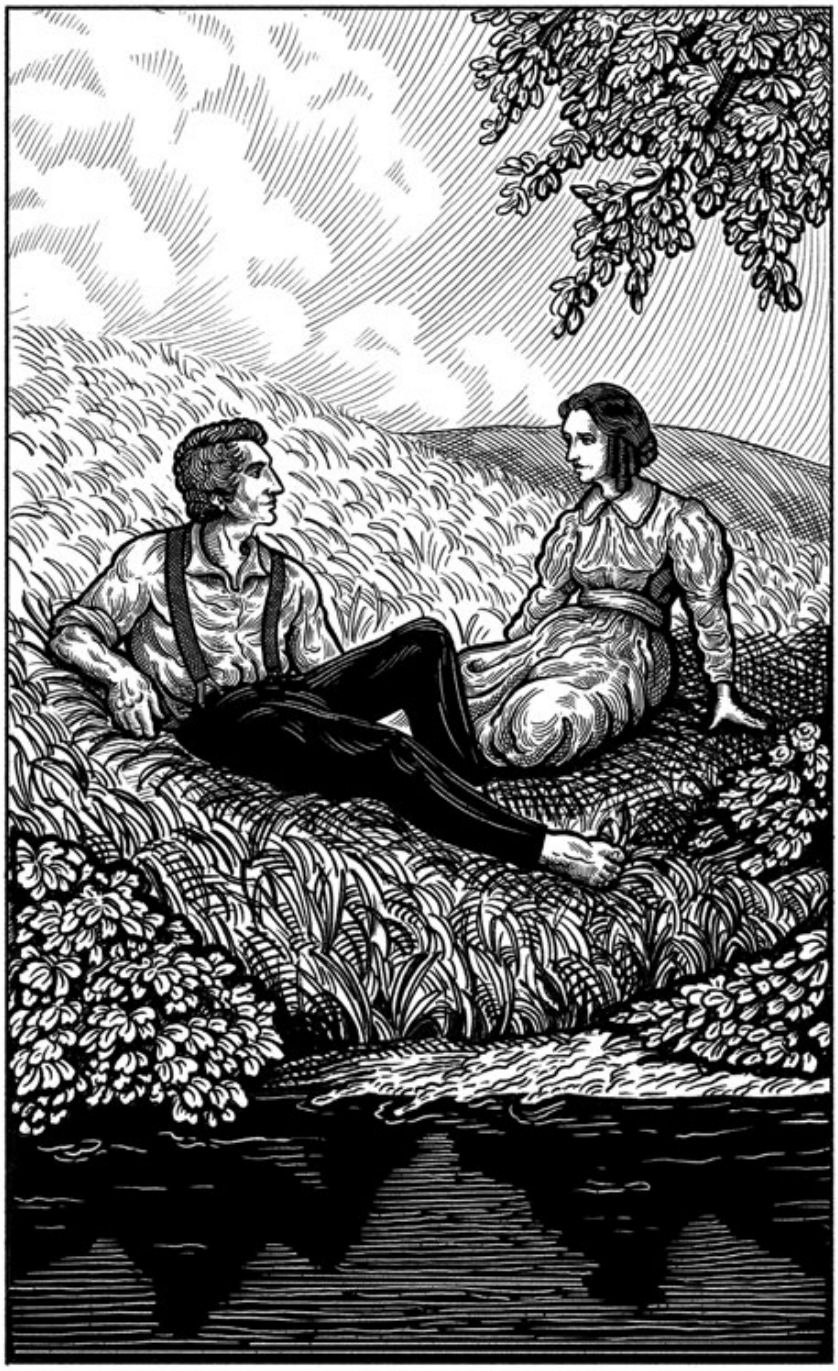

FIGURE 7. "The Prophet's Companion." Godwin.

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with me before your father makes me swear
to seven years of servitude as bride
price for your hand."

"And if he were to give
you Tryael in my stead? What then? Could you
discern between two sisters in the dark?
Did Jacob even care whose waist he held
that night?"

"Not fair! Not fair," laughed Joseph, "when
his father, Isaac, was himself half-blind.
Remember how he couldn't tell which son
was which, and Esau lost the birthright? Two
stories, the same distressing end to each.
And why? Because far-sighted men, whose eyes
habitually scan the heavens, trained
to see, across the centuries, the rise
and fall of nations, gradually lose
their sense of what's important, in the here
and now, to those whose field of vision is
more circumspect. At Jacob's feet, perhaps,
some blame I grant—"

"You grant me, hedgehog? Peace!
You court like Richard Crookback making love
to Lady Anne. Was ever woman wooed
with talk of buried, ancient histories?
Was ever woman won? I'll have you; but
you will not keep me long unless you take
a more myopic view than Abraham
and his successors. Just remember how,
when Sarah died, her husband heard the news
from foreigners because he couldn't see
his error in absconding with the dawn
to sacrifice her son. If ever I
should catch you using spectacles to read
or write, that will be sign enough of your
far-sightedness to send me off in search
of some more biddable man. Come, kiss me, now,
and no more talk of golden plates. For where
thou goest, I will go; where diggest, I

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will dig. Thy angels be my angels; and
thy God, my God."

Four lips, two souls, but one
desire; *e pluribus unum*, and this
reduction into unity no less
a miracle than multiplying loaves
and fishes. *That they may be one*, he prayed,
and though he answers our petitions for
relief each day, so seldom do we grant
his singular request that till the great
millennial day, a sacramental kiss
is all the earnest he receives some years.
Smith died a little death when Emma's lips
had paid in full; the youth who came to court
her nevermore arose.

The winter of
his discontent made glorious summer by
her coy assent, New York's adopted son
marveled to see himself through Emma's eyes,
a prophet like the patriarchs of old,
and felt himself new-made by love, reborn
and weaned from all his doubts. *So that was what*
Moroni meant, thought Joseph later, when
spontaneous emotion's overflow
was recollected in tranquility.
His talk of bringing the appropriate
companion wasn't meant to help me find
another but to help me find myself,
in being seen and heard and known by one
who loves me. Like an echo of the man
he'd been before their rendezvous, a more
resonant version of the Joseph who proposed,
attuned to fundamental frequencies,
he basked beneath unseasonably strong
mid-winter sunbeams, consonant with both
the Lehi Valley's steadfast hillslopes and
the Susquehanna's constant flow.

They wed
immediately. Emma knew that her

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decision would be met with tears and worse
if Joseph traveled back to Harmony
and asked her father's blessing, so they made
the journey to the magistrate's alone.
No friends or family to cheer them on
and strew their path with flowers, but a grin
of recognition broke across the Squire's
congenial features when he opened up
the door.

"Glass-looker!" he exclaimed. "Appears
you found your treasure after all."

"Her price
surpasses that of rubies," Joseph laughed,
"and precious stones are rare enough around
these parts, as I know well."

"I take it that
you've had no fortune, then, divining where
they buried all those Spanish dollars?"

"No,
your Honor," Emma interjected. "My
husband, if you will make him so, has not
unearthed a single piece of silver and
no longer digs for money."

"But of course
not—not with you to fill his looking glass.
Come in! Come in, and I will name you man
and wife." Consent was sought, consent received,
and through the alchemy of law, they twain
became one flesh, a corporate person with
shared rights and obligations. Marriage made
no visible impression on the mien
of either party, yet they felt themselves
transfigured by the covert power of
that primal institution. Striding from
the Squire's estate, the world was all before
them, yet their domestic tranquility
was pending some more perfect union's form,
to guide their wandering steps.

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With nothing but
the clothes upon her back, Emma endured
the trip to Manchester, where wedded bliss
was tempered by the stress of living cheek-
by-jowl with Joseph's parents. Far from home;
no female confidante to empathize
with wifely joys and strains; no room to call
her own, much less the means to furnish it,
she shouldered the connubial yoke.

"Perhaps,"
her husband ventured, "if you wrote to ask
your father, he would send your furniture
and clothing. When the weather turns, your cows
could come as well."

"Whose cows?" she asked.

"Your cows."

"Not mine. Zach Tarbill, with a penstroke, struck
me from the legal record, stripped me of
my household stuff, my field, my barn, my horse,
my ox, my ass, my anything."

"They still
are yours, regardless. I would never take
pecuniary action of my own
accord, without consulting you."

"I know,
my love, but that's the problem: you can act,
and I cannot. The most that I can hope
for is a husband who will listen."

"Let
us go to law, then, and request the courts
acknowledge you my deputy. Such things
have been before."

"And after all of that
expense of time and money, will the cows
be mine? A contract is no contract if
it alters when it alteration finds,

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and individual adaptation is
inadequate as a solution for
systemic ills. Just promise that, when God
asks you to form a new society,
you will remember us—the ladies—too."

He bowed his head and promised her, "Yes."

"Thank
you," Emma answered. "That will do for now,
until Moroni comes to give the book
into your custody. But afterwards,
could we, perhaps, return to Harmony?
By then my father should be ready to
forgive me for eloping and to greet
you as his son-in-law."

This prophecy
bore fruit before the day of harvest had
arrived. In June a letter came, addressed
to Mrs. Emma Smith, from Isaac Hale,
inviting her—and, more importantly,
her husband—back to Pennsylvania and
her father's homestead. They accepted this
armistice as the miracle it was
and worked as though they had no knowledge of
the one to come.

But others knew. They watched
and waited for September twenty-first
to pass; for Joseph to unearth the gold;
for time and space to steal it. Willard Chase
and old Sam Lawrence both believed themselves
entitled to a share of anything
discovered by their former partner—Chase
because he'd found the seerstone Joseph used
for scrying; Lawrence due to Joseph's poor
decision two years prior, when he'd tried
to bring the older man in Alvin's stead,
to get the record. Friends came too, and each
was eager to contribute. Just as well,
for Joseph realized, as the witching hour

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arrived, that he would soon have fifty pounds
of sacred relics in a sack, with no
conveyance but his own appendages.
With Emma's feet in mind, he borrowed horse
and wagon (stole? semantics) for the trip
from Joseph Knight, who'd come to witness the
fulfillment of Moroni's promise but
was sleeping when they left, at midnight.

"You
want me to what?" she asked.

"To wait," said Joseph for
the second time, descending from his seat
atop the wagon. "I need you to wait
below while I climb up the hill and fetch
the plates."

"But why? Why can't I come and meet
the angel and keep watch for you? Why let
Sam Lawrence mount the hill but not your wife?"

"When Lawrence came, I couldn't even find
the stone that marks the record's hiding place.
And if I fail again, what then? I fear
that bringing you will seem presumptuous
and lead to condemnation. Please?"

Although
she had to bite her lip to stop herself
from mentioning that perfect love casts out
all fear, Emma agreed and nodded: "Yes."
He strode away for God and glory; she
kept questions for her company. *What good*
can I accomplish sitting here while he
retrieves an ancient book of scripture? Why
does he need me *for a companion if*
I can't assist him in his labors? Why
would he need anyone? A helpmeet who
can't help or even meet with those who helm
the work is hardly worthy of the name.
But is it true that I can't help? Or has

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my husband substituted prejudice
against my sex for heavenly decree?
If Lawrence or his brother Alvin had
been chosen, neither would have stayed behind.
But maybe that's why Joseph needed me
instead, a consort who can share his task
without usurping it and see him as
a prophet, not a younger brother. Then
frustration, fear, and loneliness returned,
and Emma found herself revisiting
the questions she began with, picking at
a knot whose ravelings resisted all
attempts to tease out human agency
from foreordained events.

They also serve
who only stand and wait, and Emma stopped
her ears with prayer against the siren song
of martyrdom, her night a hymn to praise
the better fortitude of patience and
heroic meekness. She kept watch until
the dawn, as Lucy would, and Joseph spied
her through the trees, before his own approach
was noticed. She was beautiful, he saw
anew, despite—because of—her unkempt
appearance. Contemplation lent her eyes
the tincture of eternity and drew
her lips into a secret smiling, framed
by wanton ringlets bouncy with surprise,
black wires unspooling and recoiling to
the distant beat of silent drums, untamed,
against the tawny dun of Emma's cheeks.

Before he could announce his presence, she
perceived him near and saw the absence in
his arms. With horror, Emma raised her hands
to mutely query: Had he lost the plates?

But Joseph's grin broke wide across his face
in reassurance: "All is well—no, ten
times better." With the record, he explained,
the angel left an urgent warning, that

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unscrupulous associates would try
to steal the book, "And so I hollowed out
a log where they'll be safe until I can
secure them from the public view. But these
I kept, and they are marvelous!" He reached
into his pocket and withdrew a silk
handkerchief knotted in a bundle. As
his overeager fingers fumbled with
the fabric, Joseph gushed, "They're better than
the stone I found in Willard's well. He called
them *selah*. Maybe *stela*?" (*Tsohar*.) "I
can see the truth of anything, of things
to come and secret things and mysteries.
Moroni said that I should use them to
interpret and that he had done the same,
translating records of the earliest
inhabitants of the Americas."

"Before the Indians?"

"Before the fall
of Babel's tower—there were some, he said,
who left to keep their language perfect, and
Moroni's people found a history
of their migration to this hemisphere,
the book of Eber, and it documents
their downfall as a nation—civil wars,
uncivilly conducted; famine; drought;
and plague, until the kindling breath of God
withdrew. And with the history, they left
the means to translate what was written."

From
within the handkerchief he drew a pair
of prehistoric pince-nez, reading stones
encircled by a silver band which wound
around itself, between the stones, into
a supinated figure eight. The stones
themselves were oddly uniform, as if
they had been cast, like molten glass, in molds,
or if—a single egg disgorging two
great lizards that, on their majority,

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fell side-by-side into the deep, until,
subducted and digested by the earth,
their hearts compressed into zirconia—
twin stones had been deposited beneath
a vein of magma and released with one
stroke of a miner's pickaxe. Even where
the stones were smudged by Joseph's fingers, she
could see the whorls and ridges marring her
reflection were aligned. Reflexively,
she drew the handkerchief across each face,
but burnishing could no more wipe away
that imprint than a boll of cotton staunch
the broad Missouri's flow and swab it dry.

Not Joseph's finger, Emma realized. Whose
and how and therefore what were questions that
would have to wait. Her husband had begun
to speak of getting back and how he hoped
to purchase peace of mind: a chest in which
to keep the record safe from cupid eyes
and roving hands. The need for such a thing
became apparent sooner than they feared
it would.

Before the prophet could afford
to buy a chest; before he'd even struck
the water he was digging for, to put
some money in his purse, his father told
him of an organized attempt to find
the place where he had laid the book to rest:
"As I came home on the Vienna Road,
halfway, I thought I heard a voice direct
me to the Lawrences', but when I turned
and saw that there was no one near, assumed
I had imagined it. No matter, so
I started on my way again until
a messenger descended from the skies
and stopped me short."

"An angel?" Joseph asked
his namesake.

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"No, a bird."

"Was it a dove?"

"A pigeon; no."

"I would have thought, if God
intended to communicate his will
through feathered things, that he would send a dove,
the way he spoke to Noah."

"No; a dove
was sent," said Emma, "but the Lord was not
the one who bade it fly. Perhaps if men
were willing to accept his word without so much
attention to the form of those who brought
it, we would see his hand in kestrels, jays,
and magpies wimpling morning skies—our hearts
stirred for a bird regardless of its guise.
Elijah might have starved if he had spurned
the raven's sooty wing because it was
unclean according to the law. But we
digress. Please tell us, Father Smith, how you
could see that this was more than a surprise
encounter with the bird."

"Well, like I said,
just past the stand of trees that marks the turn-
off for Old Sam's, I heard a voice, but when
I turned around to keep on walking, there
it was, eye level, hovering, its wings
beating me back. As I retreated, it
descended, but if I advanced it rose
again, to bar my path. Who dances with
a pigeon? Still, since she seemed bound to have
me for a partner, I obliged and stepped
it lively: ten, nineteen, seventy-eight
steps back before that bird abandoned our
duet and glided to the ground. With cocked
head and a burbled invitation, she
requested that I follow as she hopped
along the track to Sam's place. I declined
at first, but when she took my trousers in

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her beak and started tugging, I gave up
kicking against the pricks, accepting that
this tame wild pigeon was a messenger
from heaven.

"What I found at Lawrence's
removed all doubt on that score: he and twelve
men of unsavory appearance, whose
affinity for drink was manifest
in oaths and imprecations shocking to
the ear, were taking supper off a log
he'd sawn in half. They greeted me with jeers
and boasts that by this time tomorrow they
would have the record. When I scoffed and asked
how they would find the gold without a map
or guide, Willard and Abel Chase called out
in unison, "Hey Sal!" and she appeared
behind them, like a spirit summoned to
the threshold of another world, and in
her hand that looking-glass you taught her how
to use. Then, stepping from Sam's cabin door
and lifting up her glass, she turned the day's
last light a sickly green and spoke: 'You know
what I can do with this, and so does Joe.
We mean to have that gold, and you can tell
him that I've seen the birch he hollowed out
to hide it in. A dozen pairs of eyes
should be enough to find a single log
by moonlight. Right, my boys?' I didn't wait
for their huzzahs but turned and ran for home,
stiff leg and all. Could she be bluffing?"

"No."

"How long can we afford to dither, then
in conversation? Say the word, my son,
and I can rouse a band to rival Sam's."

The son was silent, briefly, then, "All life
is precious in the sight of God, and if
I counter force with force there will be blood—
perhaps a body—laid to my account.

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Better that I should perish than be held
responsible for even one man's death,
however wicked. No—I go alone,
and if I die, the Lord will bring about
his righteous purposes through someone else."
A kiss for Emma, and he left to fetch
the record.

Not until he held it in
his hands did Joseph realize he'd not brought
a sack with which to carry home the plates
and shield his neighbors from temptation. Off
his back, a tug, a twist, and several knots
secured his shirt around the golden book.
He stood and slung the weighted cloth across
his naked shoulder just in time to hear
a rifle cocking. Providentially,
for Joseph—or, perhaps, predictably,
depending on your faith in forecasts made
by actuaries on the likelihood
of accidents involving alcohol
and firearms—his assailant's gun misfired.
The howling blasphemies suggested Sam
and Sally's dozen was eleven now,
but Joseph took no comfort in the odds
against him dropping some. He ran for home,
the only place and people he felt sure
had not the least desire to honor him
with martyrdom.

Like Jacob, going back
to Canaan, Joseph made for home, and like
the patriarch, he had to wrestle for
the privilege of arriving there alive.
Careening shirtless through the forest, he
considered that he might be dreaming, or
somnambulating, but the body that
came crashing into his laid Joseph's head
to rest on stony pillows and convinced
him otherwise. They grappled in the dust,
two shadows straining; clenching; trembling with

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exertion. Neither could prevail until,
when Joseph felt the man release his grip
to scrabble for a rock, which broke the earth
where Joseph's head had been a beat before,
the prophet seized one arm with two and wrenched
it backwards, counter-clockwise, out of joint.

No time to set it right, with ten more men
still looking for him. Running home, the word
of God clutched safely to his breast, pursued
by Sam and Sally's tribe, he recognized
the voice that raged behind him: "Curse you, Joe!
Let come what may—I'll be revenged of you
for this!" The words were Abel's, but his deeds
belonged to Cain, and no one contemplates
revenge more constantly than those who know
themselves the perpetrators of a wrong
they fear can never be forgiven, though
the one unpardonable crime is to
revenge. How could a sailor, anchored to
some seeming island, who awoke to find
it was Leviathan, adrift, and took
revenge with kicks—who had his leg bit off
and swore an oath to hunt the guilty brute
with unrelenting hatred, though it cost
himself and all his crew their lives, in an
expanding, all-consuming spiral of
reprisal, till the world was toothless, blind,
and left adrift—be pardoned? Who could weep
for such a one this side of Eden? Who
could tell him *timshel*? Taking vengeance is
a categorical rejection of
the Savior's power to forgive and his
investiture as Judge. By setting up
ourselves in place of God, declaring war
against the Prince of Peace, we nurture sins
whose penalty must be expulsion: death.

But Joseph, fleeing for his life, had not
the breath to muse upon such matters. As
a boy the prophet needed surgery

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FIGURE 8. "Joseph's Flight." Godwin.

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to save his leg from amputation, and
he still walked haltingly; however, in
this hour of need his limp became a lope,
outstripping all who chased behind him. Does
it seem incredible that Joseph, with
a gimpy leg and fifty pounds athwart
his back, could win a footrace? Hector ran
like Joseph once, before the wrath of fleet
Achilles, not for glory or a prize
but for his very life, a good man whose
survival was decided by divine
decree. If it was *your* life on the line,
dear reader, *your* salvation in the sack,
how fast could *your* feet fly? How many miles
until you would be willing to lay down
and die? Believe; although it seems a deed
of myth or legend, Joseph fought the good
fight, ran the race, and came off conqueror
in both—and whether by adrenaline
or grace, the means is less important than
the outcome.

Stumbling breathless, bloody, bruised
into his brother's waiting arms, as though
he were a self-emancipated slave
arriving on the northern bank of the
Ohio, Joseph felt that he was at
the end of all his troubles. So he was,
perhaps, though not the end for which he hoped;
Ohio isn't Canada. But the
theatrical, Ohio seasons of
his life—the mummies and the bank collapse;
the private army mustered, marched across
the country, and dismissed before a drop
of blood was shed; and the erection of
a temple whose espousals are the main
reason the world has people in it—all
was yet futurity. In Hyrum's arms
the prophet briefly felt a boy again,
when wine and other drugs were powerless
to ease his aching leg, and only clutched

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to Hyrum's breast, in endless circuits of
the sickroom, could he find relief. Not yet
the elder, though he would be soon, and yet
unwilling to be carried this time, like
the little brother he had always been—
despite the fact that he could hardly stand,
Joseph declined fraternal aid and limped
beside him to the house.

Confusion reigned
within. Had he been injured? What about
the record? Who attacked him? Did he think
the dangers passed, or should they set a watch?
He answered as he could but struggled with
the silent queries posed by every pair
of eyes that lingered on the bundle in
his lap. When Abraham, on Ishmael's
behalf, requested an expansion of
the covenant, no reason for the Lord's
refusal was revealed; and when he sought
consent to share his carnal knowledge of
the golden plates, no rationale for their
exclusion answered Joseph's question: *Why?*
Why not affirm their faith by sight? The foot
of one whose hand had held the word of God—
not Wycliffe's words or those of James and all
the translators but his, the same as if
they'd touched the stony tables Moses brought
down Sinai's switchbacks—surely such a foot
could never slide from off the Rock of our
Salvation. I can understand why Sam
and Sally couldn't be allowed to see
the record, casting pearls before the swine.
But why not Emma or my parents? All
my family and friends have gathered. If
it has to be concealed from those I love
and live with, where will I find safety, space,
and time to delve the record's meaning for
myself? Its size and shape are visible
to all, despite my linen shirttails, and
the effort needed just to shift so small

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a parcel one arm to the other should
be evidence enough the plates are made
of gold. Or lead; their color can't be seen.
Is that what I conceal, removing all
that glisters from the sight of those who might
be tempted?

PEACE AND PATIENCE: MANY HERE
SHALL SEE THE RECORD, IN MINE OWN DUE TIME.

Inaudibly, the words resounded through
his mind, as though thoughts higher than his own,
in perfect diapason, tuned the voice
of his subconscious intellect to its
most fundamental frequency. He knew
that God had spoken. Joseph knew, and told
those present what he'd learned.

In retrospect,
the prophet recognized that this was a
mistake, that revelation is like salt:
a curative whose savor can become
a scourge if trodden into fertile ground
and not massaged into a votive flank.
With good intentions, those who heard him speak
translated Joseph's declaration for
their friends and neighbors, publishing good news,

"... that all who had or would support him through
this present trial ..."

"... soon, I'm sure he said
it would be soon ..."

"... could turn its pages for
ourselves!"

The curious arrived with cash,
the idle with a jug; the learned came
with expertise, the clergy with reproach.
Such offerings were spurned, like Cain's, with calm
indifference, but to the seekers, with
their mustard seeds, the prophet had respect

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and spoke of harvests yet to be. If none
but these had kept his family from their
autumnal labors, Joseph might have stayed.
His old compatriots, however, still
believed themselves entitled to the plates
and grew more brazen in their efforts to
secure them. Gangs of ten or twelve would raid
a home, a barn, a workshop, anywhere
that Sally glimpsed the gold, and ransack from
the floorboards to the furnishings. As yet
the record hadn't been discovered, but
the status quo was unsustainable,
so Joseph wrote to Emma's father and
accepted Isaac's invitation back
to Harmony.

He drew the gold from its
obscurement in a bed of flax, too young
to know to count the cost beforehand (not
that Joseph Murdock was a name he would
have recognized in any case), although
the price of gold from flax has always been
a son: your only son. But debts are paid
tomorrow, by our future selves; for that
moment, it was enough that he'd received
and kept the covenant. He kept it in
a cask of beans for the duration of
their journey back to Pennsylvania, where
the prophet sought reprieve from prying eyes
and fingers. No such luck—when Isaac heard
his no-good, treasure-digging son-in-law
had found a cache at last, his bosom swelled
with generosity and even an
apology for Joseph; but, when he
was told the gold was holy and the word
of God, as if from Sinai, by divine
decree to be withheld from human view,
like Moses' face behind the veil; in short,
when he had realized that this charlatan
who stole his daughter now proposed to keep
her in a state of penury instead

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of using what the Lord had given to
provide for those of his own household, he
laid down an ultimatum:

"Either you
show us this golden Bible here and now
or we no longer have a daughter by
the name of Smith." Their time in Harmony
seemed at an end before it had begun.

However, happily for Emma and
her groom, the other half of Isaac's *we*
felt disinclined to acquiesce in this
decision to disown her child, and said
so: "And if *you* show *our* sweet daughter, in
her delicate condition, to the door,
then I'll no longer have a husband by
the name of Hale." Just like her namesake, this
Elizabeth announced a birth and found
her husband dumbstruck; she gave shelter to
the couple, persecuted for their talk
of angels, waiting for the days of their
delivery to be accomplished. So
it was, and so it had been written. Great
with expectations for the year to come,
the Smiths could welcome eighteen twenty-eight
in peace and safety, thanks to her.

Before
they left New York, an older neighbor, who
was there the night that Joseph carried home
the record, learned of their departure and
prevailed upon the prophet to accept
a gift of fifty dollars. With this help
from Martin Harris, they made do until
the house that Emma's brother built was theirs
and Joseph found employment in the fields,
transmuting nature's early green to gold.
But how to get the golden into black
and white without debasing all that made
it precious? How to reproduce the truths
and beauties of a book he couldn't read?

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A lack of privacy and threats of theft
prevented Joseph, in New York and while
he lived in Isaac's home, from handling and
examining the plates, but now that he
and Emma were emancipated from
parental supervision, nothing came
before his duty to decipher and
disseminate God's word.

Moroni had
already come—again—to chastise him:
"Exceeding great neglect," he'd said, and in
a voice that broke across the prophet's back
like thirty-nine. So now the record was
his daily bread, the only subject, as
it seemed to Emma, ever in his mouth.
Yet chewing with her on the problem of
translation hadn't made the characters
engraven on its golden pages less
inscrutable. Like hardtack, sent to sea
so indurate that sailors sometimes thought
they had been given stones instead of bread
and dipped it in the ocean so as not
to break their teeth, these scriptures needed to
be saturated in the prophet's tears
before his heart was soft enough to make
digestion possible. He copied out
the characters on scraps of paper that
he carried in his pockets, folding and
unfolding them as though the flight of crows
and jays, which wheeled above him as he worked,
reminded Joseph of the hieroglyphs
and might reveal to him their secrets, like
the cranes of shrewd Palamedes. Or when
he saw a rock face signed by finches for
a generation, scored by claw and beak,
perhaps he fancied, for a moment, he
had found a new Rosetta Stone and pulled
out his transcription of the record to
compare—as though an infinite array
of finches, on an endless plain of slate

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for all eternity, could ever scratch
a sentence in reformed Egyptian, with
the English underneath. Whether because
he lacked a *templum* to facilitate
interpretation of the birdsign or
because his father's gift for augury
through animals could not accommodate
the quantity of revelation queued
and waiting for transmission, Joseph's first
attempts to render scripture into words
miscarried.

Next he tried the spectacles,
which worked impeccably for inquiries
on other matters. Was his family
in health? They were: the right-hand stone began
to glow, internal light refracting on
its surface, bending color into shape
and answering his question—he could see
his mother kneading dough, Don Carlos at
her side with pilfered not-yet-bread between
his fingertips, a secret smile upon
her lips. Was Widow Whitehead's southern field
on top of water? No: the left-hand stone
showed Joseph what was underground—a bed
of gravel running straight as rails and flat
enough to be a road. Her northern field?
Beside a sycamore which marked the line
between her land and Yeoman Coates, he saw
the water dancing up and running for
Lake Erie: yes, the right-hand stone had shown—
there was. However, queries on how best
to tie abstruse significations back
to sensible ideas and language met
with mixed results. Occasionally he
caught sight of faces and connected them
to characters, but character depends
on context; connotation; syntax. Names
drive inward an external self defined
by others; how could Joseph hope to learn
the names of people ripped untimely from

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the social matrix that makes humans of
us all?

Persistently, these efforts to
restore a name and standing to the dead
were compromised by Joseph's struggles with
converting light to truth. "Imagine that
you're walking through an orchard," he explained
to Emma, "and a gust of wind blows off
ten thousand springtime petals, so that all
the air is filled with flowers flying past
your face. That's what it feels like when I look
directly at the record; I can't see
the branches for the blossoms or discern
an apple from a cherry tree, much less
produce the fruits that are supposed to prove
that I'm a prophet. Or, imagine that
you're lying underneath a waterfall
of light and trying to identify
each drop before it passes; part and whole
are indistinguishable!"

"Snow-blind," she
said thoughtfully. "Most of the time, when we
can't see, there's not enough light, but too much
will blind—like staring straight into the sun,
or when the snow becomes a mirror for
its rays, and just to look outside you have
to squint and blink. My father says that that's
how Matthew Talbot lost his sight. Our eyes
need light to see, but they must need some dark
as well. Perhaps the Lord made pupils black
because we need receptors for the dark
as well as light: Corinthians thirteen,
verse two, *For now we see as through a glass,
darkly*. Moroni's glasses—maybe you
could use them as you did the stone, inside
a hat." He doubted Emma's logic but
felt such desire for a solution to
his problem that he would have traveled from
Damascus to Samaria at her

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suggestion, having sensed the spirit that
had prompted her proposal.

Still, the sight
of English words and phrases so surprised
that Joseph jerked his head up from the hat
before he'd had a chance to read them: "You
were right," he blurted out. "It works!" Unless
the too-white, naked body of the truth
is clothed in garments dark enough that its
refulgence dazzle gradually, all
the human race, like moths, would be consumed
in flame and every man be blind—so we
walk backwards into Father's tent, with bells
upon our feet, to seek the holiest
of holy places, where his presence is
the only source of light to penetrate
a night of our own making. Thus, success
for Joseph, by circuitous design,
or more straightforward hazard, came at last.

She grinned at the acknowledgment, to know
that she had been essential after all,
and with an eager curiosity
she asked: "What does it say?" He looked again
and recognized the characters that he
had copied from the record's first gold leaf
and puzzled over vainly. Underneath
each lexeme was the corresponding word
or phrase, in English reminiscent of
the King James Bible—whether because God
speaks in an idiom to which we are
accustomed or because he is, in fact,
an Englishman, the prophet neither knew
nor cared.

THE BOOK OF LEHI.

Being an
abridgment of the history prepared
by Lehi, after he obtained the plates
of brass from Laban, at the time of his

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departure from Jerusalem. An account
of his afflictions in the wilderness
and how the Lord preserved his family
from hunger and rebellion as he led
them to the promised land. Together with
a record of their kings, until the reign
of King Mosiah.

As he read, the words
were scraped off what he thought was vellum, and
an unseen hand, with antiquated strokes,
refreshed the text. *Two coats of skins,* he thought,
and then a sheet for writing. How long till
the Lambskin is exhausted—gone? And whence
the vanished scripture?

Joseph shook his head
and asked that Emma scribe, then bowed a third
time to his work, and this is what she wrote:

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